

The Pensioner

Journal of the Brighton & Hove Pensioners' Forum

No. 35, Spring 2010

The Big Freeze

Pensioners' Forum member Francis Tonks reflects on the recent cold snap and its wider impact on the elderly community in Brighton and Hove

We are all just getting over the coldest winter for several years. The snow came down, melted and then froze, making it dangerous to walk out without slipping over. My neighbour broke his wrist and the A & E department at Sussex County Hospital was swamped with hundreds of people who had fallen and broken bones. It seemed to me that the Council were slow in getting grit onto the pavements, but later all the staff rallied round and provided a good service. I remember one awful winter in the 1960's and I trudged through the snow from Black Rock to Saltdean one evening when most buses had stopped running. Perhaps our country is not prepared because this weather is exceptional.

In Germany people have to clear their paths and pavements. We went to Sweden in February a few years ago. Houses were warm and comfy. Trains ran on time. Yet there was thick snow everywhere. I was particularly impressed to see smart young women social workers taking elderly pensioners out for a walk. It was one-to-one. Each pensioner had their own designated social worker.

In Britain, in spite of winter fuel payments to the elderly, there are a million people over 60 who live alone and are in fuel poverty. That means they spend more than 10% of their income on heating. Angela Eagle, minister for Pensions and the Ageing Society says "we have lifted 900,000 pensioners



Recent snow on Brighton beach

out of relative poverty since 1997 and are spending over £13 billion a year more on pensions thanks to the introduction of measures like pension credit and winter fuel payments". Yet Andrew Harrop, head of public policy at Age Concern, complains that progress in cutting poverty has come to a standstill in the last three years.

People on a pension should not have to choose between heating or eating. There needs to be a major hike in payments to a realistic £500 a year instead of the scheme, where you are on benefit and get £25 a day if it stays cold long enough. An Energy Bill is proposed to help the poorest households. The oldest and poorest people are the most at risk in freezing conditions. Sadly they cannot wait.

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Come to the '**Any Questions**' panel event where election candidates will answer your questions about issues which affect older people. 31st March at Brighton Town Hall - see page 3 for details!

Editor's Letter

I have very recently taken over from Paula McEnaney's very capable hands as the new Editor and Administrator to the Pensioners' Forum, which is a sizeable but exciting task. I am really looking forward to learning more about the issues that you consider important, so we can work together to continue and expand the Forum's essential work.

The Forum campaigns for appropriate services for older people in the city, especially those such as housing, health, community safety, transport, education and environmental issues. We can only do this with your input, and any feedback is encouraged – so please send in your letters, emails and ideas!

My own background is diverse and includes administration, project co-ordination and design. Whilst I am new to the Forum, I will endeavour to contribute all my enthusiasm, skills and dedication

to its causes. This is all one large learning curve, but I hope together we can make a difference. We look forward to hearing from you all, so please do get in touch.



Lila Hunnisett
Editor / Administrator to the Pensioners' Forum

How to contact the Editor

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Email: lila.hunnisett@pf.bh-impetus.org

Can we have a more sustainable life and less impact on our planet?



View from one of Brighton's many allotments

Perhaps you are growing your own food, either on an allotment or on your garden or balcony. Maybe you have decided to travel less by car and use more public transport or even cycle around town. It could be that you are more careful when using energy in your home or just worried about extreme weather conditions.

At Climate Connections we want to connect stories of people living in Brighton & Hove with people living in other parts of the world, sharing their experiences, challenges and responses to climate change. Climate Connections reaches out to and links community groups and individuals. We provide a space for people

to find out what to do, and for others publicise what they have already done, in response to climate change.

Climate Connections will launch in Brighton and Hove with an outdoor large scale photographic exhibition illustrating stories of people living in different parts of the world alongside local, Brighton & Hove, residents at Jubilee Square on Sunday March 28. The exhibition will be in the Square for two weeks.

Over the next two years, the project will include an interactive website following the stories of those people featured on the exhibition, with information on city-wide environmental projects and community initiatives, ways to get involved, links, advice and updates to help you take action. We will also organise and run a series of city-wide workshops about practical steps you can take to help tackle climate change.

The project is a partnership between Brighton Peace and Environment Centre, Brighton & Hove City Council and Oxfam GB. It is financed by the Department of International Development (DFID).

For more information please visit www.climateconnections.org.uk



Older People's Council News



Jack Hazelgrove, OPC

Jack Hazelgrove, Chair of the OPC gives The Pensioner his regular update on the work of the OPC, which is an independent body set up and supported by Brighton & Hove City Council. It works in Partnership with the Council and other large statutory services to give older people a say in policies and services.

I recently attended a degree conferment ceremony for Brighton University at the Dome.

It was inspiring to see so many young people (and some not so young) ready to take on the challenges facing our country at this

difficult time, and to appreciate how lucky we are in the city to host two major universities, notwithstanding the difficulties of providing affordable accommodation for all these entering higher education. We are also fortunate to have the University of the 3rd Age (U3A), which for a modest annual subscription opens up fresh horizons for older people seeking to keep their brains active.

Your Older People's Council continues to thrive, and is still a rarity, in that all 9 Councillors are elected on a full postal ballot by those aged 60+ every four years. Several Councillors will be standing down in 2011 having completed the maximum term of 8 years. The next election will be in June 2011, so please think about putting your name forward – remember this is a non-party political vote – you just have to produce a statement for the electorate saying why you want to serve the 47,000 over-sixties in the

city. Interest is growing in our pioneering innovation, and we recently met a deputation from the London Borough of Lewisham who were keen to know how we operate.

On the campaigning front, we recently wrote to all the political groups on the Council urging them to maintain the Council's subsidy to the non-commercial bus services which Brighton & Hove Bus Company would not be able to provide without this support. By the time you read this, you will know how successful we have been in our lobbying, since the Council budget meeting is on the 25th February.

Another of our concerns has now become a high profile national debate leading up to the general election; I refer to the conference we organised with Age Concern and the LINK on the Green Paper about the future of social care. As usual, funding issues have found the parties at loggerheads. Gordon Brown promised free personal home care for the most in need, but there has been concern expressed about the cost of this falling on local government. Time is running out as we expect the general election in May. It remains to be seen whether these goodww intentions about this, and also residential care, make it into the statute book before Parliament is dissolved.

Our own contribution to the run-up to the election is to organise an 'Any Questions' panel for election candidates to answer questions from older people about their concerns. This is on Weds 31st March from 11am to 1pm at Brighton Town Hall. If you intend to come along, please send your questions to me, Jack Hazelgrove, c/o The Pensioner, or email me – jack.hazelgrove@yahoo.co.uk.

Have your say, and come to the 'Any Questions' panel event where election candidates will answer your questions about issues which affect older people. 31st March at Brighton Town Hall, 11am-1pm.



www.olderpeoplescouncil.org / tel: 01273 296427 / email: olderpeoplescouncil@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Free 60+ Water Confidence Swimming Lessons!

Active for Life Project is supporting a pilot project to help people make the most of the Free Swimming Scheme in Brighton & Hove. 6 weeks of free water confidence sessions/swimming lessons are available for people aged 60+ who would like to take part. The lessons take place as follows:

- King Alfred - 60+ Mondays – 3 – 4 p.m.
- St Luke's Swimming Pool - 60+ Wednesdays - 3 – 4p.m.

If you are interested in taking part, and to find out about the next start date call 01273 292569 or email activefor-life@brighton-hove.gov.uk



This information was taken from the Age Concern Newsletter November 2009 for Brighton & Hove

Paying for Social Care

This seems, at last, to have hit the headlines and will probably be an important election issue. But rather than wait for its White Paper, setting out a reasoned discussion of the several options set out in last year's Green Paper, the Government seems to have 'jumped the gun' in favouring a

tax of £20,000 to be collected from one's estate after death. Is this what we want? Would we prefer to take out national or private insurance before we grow old? Come to the OPC meeting to challenge our local candidates (see p3 for details).

Pensioners' Forum News

by Joan Moorhouse,
member of the
Pensioners' Forum

Life is never dull for Forum Committee members, often hectic but most of us are from the generation that lived through air raids, fathers and brothers being called up and some doing military or war service themselves, so we can cope!

I am pleased to welcome our new Administrator and Editor, Lila, who took up her post in January. Peter Lloyd, Les Terry and Diana Ward-Davis, assisted by Steve Lawless from Impetus, did a brilliant job in appointing someone with the necessary skills so quickly after Paula left at the beginning of December. We are sure that Lila will produce a journal to the same high quality and the editorial group will work co-operatively with Lila as we have with past editors.

The **Older People's Day** in November was a huge success, attracting record numbers of older people and exhibition stands with an excellent entertainment programme. Here we acknowledge the hard work and commitment which Paula put in to make it one of the most successful events the Forum and the Older People's Council (OPC) have organised.

At our AGM we announced that Diana Ward-Davis was elected to the Management Committee and we are taking up the issues members raised in partnership with **60+ Action Group** and the **OPC**.

We were devastated by the news of Sheila Schaffer's death in December and we feel her loss keenly. She was a founding and pivotal member of the Forum, partaking in its many activities and representing us nationally. She was always ready for fun and some of us experienced that through the older people's samba band, Silver Sounds. She has left a huge gap also in the Pensioners' Association. The large number of people who attended Sheila's funeral was a mark of the affection with which she was held.

I announced at the AGM that I would be standing down as Chair after three years in the role. We are

experimenting with committee members having 'taster sessions' in chairing the Committee meetings and undertaking some of the work I performed while Chair. I still have until November before my election to the Committee expires and so I shall be a working member, especially as part of the editorial group of *The Pensioner*, until then.

Few of you will have escaped the news that how social care for the elderly will be paid for has become a political football. This is disappointing as in our last issue we reported that a consultation was being held on the Government's **Green Paper**. Forum members sent collective and individual responses to this and attended the meeting to discuss the proposals organised by the OPC.

I agree with Dame Joan Bakewell that most older people, faced either by living in squalor with inadequate care or, after they die, having a fixed deduction from the money going to their children, would opt for the latter – and so, I suspect, would their children! The National Care Service could operate like the NHS – everyone pays in and you draw on it, based on need not ability to pay.



Some snaps of Older People's Day 2009, taken by Ray Gibson

What might the Equalities Bill mean for you?

The government is acting to outlaw discrimination against older people – Simon Burgess explores what this will mean in reality

As someone who used to work in the NHS, was my grandmother's carer and saw my parents' difficulties accessing the services they needed as their health deteriorated, I feel strongly that discrimination against older people needs tackling urgently. Nearly one in six people in Britain are over the retirement age, that's 11 million men and women, who are making, and have made, a vital contribution to our society, our communities and families, but who are too often denied what is rightfully theirs.

The Government is now taking a new law through Parliament, the Equalities Bill, which will outlaw discrimination against older people for good. Parliament recently outlawed age discrimination in the workplace in 2006, so that people could not lose their job, have their contracts changed or pay reduced on the basis of their age. Now the

Government is looking to close the remaining gaps in the law, to make sure that older people cannot be discriminated against by any providers of goods or services. For example, 1 in 5 older people are refused car or travel insurance, not because of their personal health or financial status, but because they are deemed 'too old' by the insurers. This makes going on holiday or hiring a car either impossible or much too expensive for too many people. The new law would demand that each individual is assessed in their own merits.

Likewise, public services, which many older people rely on, will have to comply. Your local NHS doctors, for instance, will have to give the same care and attention to an older person that they would for a much younger person with the same condition. This is about putting fairness into action, and the peace of mind and dignity of knowing

you'll be treated equally. The law also includes special provisions to ensure that disabled older people are given extra protection, and for the first time, it will be illegal for anyone to discriminate against a carer, a friend or family member looking after an older person. The purpose of the new law is to make sure nobody is given special treatment, rather that everyone gets a fair deal, and surely that is what we all want? There is plenty else that needs to be done to ensure services are of the quality that we all want to see, but this legislation is an important step forward in ensuring that what is available is delivered fairly.



Sheila Schaffer 1927 – 2009

Sheila, our friend and colleague, died on December 30th last year from leukaemia. She was 82 and all her life had campaigned for equalities, peace and justice. As a Councillor she had represented Hanover Ward and was Mayor from 1995 to 1996. But above all, she was an active campaigner. Her house in Pelham Square was a centre for meetings and committees, which she welcomed with great generosity. This was all part of her work for the United Nations Association and the Labour Party. She was tireless too, in her support for pensioners and she founded the Pensioners' Association.



I remember her especially on the Great Dieppe Trips, where she would cycle with her friend Joyce through the Normandy countryside. I also accompanied them both in 2003 to London for the massive 1.5 million strong demonstration against a war in Iraq.

Professionally Sheila had been a librarian and it was fitting that a memorial service was held at the Sussex University Meeting House on January 26th to celebrate her life and work. 200 people attended and we ended by singing 'The Red Flag'.

She will be sadly missed but her greatest memorial would be to carry on work for the good causes she championed in life.

Francis Tonks

Tune in....

Tune into 'At Home this Morning', the local radio programme made for older people by Grey Matters. It is broadcast every Tuesday at 11am and Sunday at 10am on 97.2 FM.



Have you claimed the Pension Credit you may be entitled to? Many pensioners are entitled to Pension Credit, but are unaware they are eligible.

Pension Credit provides some people over the age of 60 with extra cash and can also provide access to help with Council Tax and fuel bills. However, it is estimated that up to 1.8 million eligible people are failing to claim it. One third of pensioners in poverty could be lifted out of it if they claimed all the income-related benefits to which they are entitled.

You can apply for Pension Credit by calling 0800 99 1234, or look for further information at www.direct.gov.uk/pensions. You may also be able to get further advice on this or on other benefits to which you may be entitled by contacting your local Citizens' Advice Bureau – call 0845 1203710 or visit the website - www.citizensadvice.org.uk.



A life changing experience

Many of you know Dorothy Engmann and what a leading figure she was in Brighton and Hove. Dorothy was Director of Age Concern Brighton who led the merger with Hove and Portslade and built it into one of the most highly regarded Age Concerns in Britain. During her time as Director, from 1994 to 2007, she was a powerful advocate for older people, a staunch supporter of the fledgling Older People's Council and was instrumental in establishing The Pensioners' Forum. Before taking up her placement in Thailand she had to learn to ride a motor cycle but that is only part of the courage of someone who could have settled for an easy retirement.

“You will be working with people from a different culture with very different life experiences”. These were the words I remembered most from my Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) training when I left the UK in May 2007, to take up a two year placement in Chiang Mai with the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT). And how true it proved to be!

I had flattered myself that I knew what was happening in Burma; I used to read the quality press in the UK and I have always had a lively interest in current affairs. But my first task was to assist in the drafting of a press release concerning the horrific rape and murder of a young school girl in Kachin State in northern Burma, allegedly perpetrated by Government soldiers, and the enormity of what is happening in Burma finally took on real meaning for me.

Burma is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world and throughout its existence as an independent state there has been conflict between central government and the various indigenous groups - including the Kachin - seeking autonomy. Several groups have entered into ceasefire arrangements and they have been granted de facto administrative authority over the areas under their control, but they have no influence on the political process.

Burma has been ruled since 1962 by a series of military regimes, one of the longest running and most brutal military dictatorships in the world. Although there is no external threat, the regime has continued to build up its army and to expand its military presence throughout the country, particularly in indigenous areas. The regime spends under 1% of GDP on the health and education sectors combined, while spending over 40% of the national budget on its army. In Kachin State, between



1992 and 2006, the number of Burma Army battalions stationed there increased from 26 to 41 despite the cease fire agreement reached in 1994.

The regime's troops have been committing systematic and widespread human rights violations, including forced labour, forced relocation, torture, rape, arbitrary arrest, looting, forced portering and summary execution. They have been using rape as a strategy of repression on women and girls, particularly in the indigenous areas. I am proud to have had the opportunity to support the work of KWAT, whose brave women secure funding from the West and return to Kachin State to raise awareness of human rights and democracy. It is essential that all indigenous peoples in Burma are in a position to make an informed vote in the upcoming election. No doubt the current regime will use their participation as evidence of its legitimacy, but the voices of indigenous groups like the Kachin must be heard. *Dorothy Engmann*

Come and join in the fun at Patching Lodge!

LifeLines at Age Concern Brighton, Hove and Portslade is running a variety of interesting and creative activities for over 50s at Patching Lodge on Eastern Road. Anyone from the Turner, Queen's Park and Craven Vale is welcome to come along and enjoy these free activities, which are organised and run by our wonderful team of volunteers.

Drop-in Games morning

Mondays from 10:30am until 12:30pm in the coffee bar, no prior booking required, just come along, meet new people and play your favourite games and learn some new ones over a cup of tea or coffee.

Art Class

Tuesday mornings from 10am until 12pm in the Activities Room. Please phone Alan or Janette on 508118 if you would like to join this class, as numbers are limited, but a few places are currently open to new members.

Read Aloud Group

Tuesday afternoons from 2pm until 4pm in the lounge. This is another drop-in group, no prior booking required, everyone is welcome to come along to keep the experience of reading alive as you get older.

Ladybirds Dance Class

Thursday mornings from 10am until 12pm in the Activities Room. Please phone Sheila on 01273 698406 if you would like to join this class, as numbers are limited, but a few places are currently open to new members.

Knitting Network

Every third Tuesday morning of the month, (currently at Sloane Court, next door to Patching Lodge) from 10am until 12pm in the lounge. This is a drop-in group, so no prior booking is required, just come along for a knit and a natter on 16th March, 20th April, 18th May and 15th June. We supply needles and wool.

The second **Old Spice Cooking Course for older men** will be at Courtney King House on Eastern Road. This course is free to join, so if you are over 50 and would like to learn some basic cooking skills over an 8 week period, starting in March, please phone Andrew on 07908 210010.

We hope to add further activities to the list, but we can't do it without you! If there is an activity you would like to see at Patching Lodge or in the local area, something you enjoy yourself and would like to share with others, why not talk to us about setting up your own group with our support? We cover all reasonable expenses. **Call the LifeLines team today on 01273 508118** to discuss your ideas or to just come along and have a look! We are particularly keen to hear from anyone who might be interested in running tea dances once or twice a month.



LifeLines



Age and Experience Making a Difference
Are you aged 50+? Could you help an older person become more active?



We urgently need volunteer Activity Partners!

It isn't easy to start a new activity or join a group on your own. As an Activity Partner you will be matched with an older person in the Queens Park, Turner and Craven Vale areas of Brighton, and accompany them to social groups or in activities such as walking, knitting, swimming, or any activity they wish to do.

Getting together weekly, you will help them to become more active and independent, and have fun at the same time! If you are interested in becoming an Activity Partner, you will need to be available for 2 hours per week for a minimum 12 week period from April 2010. Training and expenses will be provided.

Please contact the LifeLines team today and start to make a real difference to an older person's life!

Telephone:

(01273) 508118

Email:

lifelines@ageconcern-bhp.org.uk

Write to:

**LifeLines, 2A Port Hall Road,
Brighton BN1 5PD**



Old Spice Cooking Course for Older Men

Dignity – one of our government's latest buzz-words: older people must be treated with dignity. But what does that mean? Many of us would find it easier to define "undignified behaviour". The Department of Health has, hopefully, set out 10 Dignity Challenges:

1. Have a zero tolerance of all forms of abuse.
2. Support people with the same respect you would want for yourself or a member of your family.
3. Treat each person as an individual by offering a personalised service.
4. Enable people to maintain the maximum possible level of independence, choice and control.
5. Listen and support people to express their needs & wants.
6. Respect people's right to privacy.
7. Ensure people feel able to complain without fear of retribution.
8. Engage with family members and carers as care partners
9. Assist people to maintain confidence and a positive self-esteem
10. Act to alleviate people's loneliness and isolation.

Each of these items is further elaborated. It all makes good sense. But, most of us will probably find ourselves protesting "you haven't listened to me" rather than "you haven't treated me with dignity!".

Water, madam?

Joyce Laverpreddy recently wrote to *The Pensioner* to remind us all how important it is to drink enough water

I am writing this as I have been helped so much by having more water and salt. Some time ago I became ill in the Steine. I could not stand up and my eyes, arms and legs would not work properly. I was taken to A & E; when the young doctor saw me, he decided I was dehydrated. This surprised me as I never seemed to get thirsty, but drank plenty. However, I was given a drip. That evening the Departmental Sister came to me and told me a bed had been reserved for me as it had been thought I was having either a stroke or a heart attack, but now I was quite better. I went home very hopefully. I did not give it much thought. No-one told me to do anything to prevent a further attack.

A year later I was about to go on holiday but had to cancel it as I had a further attack. Looking for something to read, I found a book called 'Water and Salt – Your Healer From Within' by Dr. F. Batmanghelidj. As a result I started to drink nine mugs of water a day plus more salt.

I have been amazed at how much better I feel. As a result, I felt I should share what has happened to me with others. Now I realise older people do not feel thirsty or feel tea and coffee will take the place of water. Really, we need water to prevent dehydration.

Please consult your doctor before undertaking any major dietary changes.

A network of forums

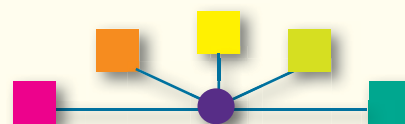
With increasing fervour, government asserts that it must listen to and respect the views of the people; everywhere we hear the buzz-words – participate, control, and engagement. But how to achieve these goals remains a problem. How might government listen to us? New organisations are needed; one such is the local LINK described elsewhere in this issue.

Better Government for Older People (BGOP) seems to have run out of steam. The Government Office of the South East (GOSE) is keen to support a local regional organisation. Already many communities have their own "forums" – our Pensioners' Forum is one. Help the Aged and Age Concern have been active in bringing these together; our own Isla Robertson

and the late Sheila Schaffer have been active members of a steering group.

At a meeting in London in November, attended by Peter Lloyd, the South East Seniors Network (SENS) was launched, with an impressive mission statement.

To be successful, SENS and its constituent local forums must demonstrate that they are responsible to their communities and that their recommendations are actively considered and responded to by the relevant government offices. They must not be mere talking shops of a few self-appointed, albeit genuinely concerned individuals.



60+ Action Group News



The 60+ Action Group runs group meetings for older people in four neighbourhoods across Brighton and Hove and is also affiliated with Evergreens Lunch Club. The purpose of the 60+ Action Neighbourhood Groups is to work together to enable older people to tackle issues which affect our everyday lives. Project Leader Jo Tulloch updates you on the group's recent activities.

60+ Action groups have been very busy. After we had all got over Christmas (and our own 60+ parties), in January all the groups participated in a survey to find out what information and speakers members valued most. The results of the survey are being analysed and will be used to plan future meetings.

Also in January, the West Hove group hosted a visit from the Food Partnership on the theme of "Cooking Healthily for One on a Budget". Right before our eyes, Gina from the Food Partnership rustled up a very tasty Spanish omelette, and we were all treated to some! She also gave out some recipes which Betty and Jo are converting to large type, and which will be available in the groups soon. And the Craven Vale group had a visit from the University of Brighton Pharmacy Department to prepare us for the arrival of ten of their students, who will be interviewing individual members from this group about their medications. The students have to

guess from knowing the medications (without being told) what medical condition the member might have. They will then find out from the member if they were right, and may suggest more effective treatments that the member can ask their GP about.

In March the groups will be finding out about the NHS national database that all our details will soon be stored on (unless we opt out). This information will be available to any doctor or hospital anywhere in the country. There are conflicting views about whether the database is a good thing or not. The groups will find out the pros and cons by playing a game called, "Who Sees What?" so each person can make up their own minds about whether they want their details stored on the national system. Then in



May, we will have visits from the Credit Union, but after that the programme will depend on what the January survey suggests our members want.

If you want further information about 60+ Action, or to find the group nearest to you, please ring Betty (779888) or Jo (229004). We'll be pleased to tell you more. We also have a website at www.bh-impetus.org.

60+ Action Group Meetings · Tuesday 16th March, 2.30 - 4pm (West Hove Group) Muriel House, Ingram Crescent West, Portland Road, Hove · Wednesday 31st March, 2 - 4pm & Wednesday 28th April, 2 - 4pm, (East Brighton Group) Craven Vale Resource Centre, Queensway, Craven Vale.

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Letters

Bored of boards!

A-boards. Hazard! I find problems from the south side pavement on Western Road between Montpelier Road to Lansdowne Road. I am 77, fairly mobile, but have lost most sight in the right eye, already have one knee replacement and have osteoarthritis. Yes, A-boards and other obstacles are a pain. So are bicycle handlebars poking through the bus stop railings at Western Road. One more thing really annoying is 'For Sale', 'Sold', 'To Let' and 'Let By' boards; estate agents leave them up for years. I thought the local council had passed a bill to stop these unsightly boards cluttering up and spoiling our ever-improving city, not just conservation areas.

Ron Forrest

Want your say?

Send letters to: Lila Hunnisett, Editor, The Pensioner, Impetus, 65-67 Western Road, Hove, BN3 2JQ. Unfortunately we can't print them all and some may be edited.

It's clear we need a mighty national campaign, to which Brighton pensioners must contribute, if we are to save our bus pass. It is essential to let all candidates know that a great proportion of the 11 million pensioners will rise up in anger if they dare to remove or interfere with it, with means testing, etc. Indeed, we should be demanding its extension to cover transport throughout the whole country, instead of robbing us of it. I urge all readers to write to their MP, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and to all main parties expressing our displeasure at the very mention of its removal. Let's be clear: we get a measly pension and have only won this concession by our consistent campaigning; some of us have fought in a war, we've all contributed to the creation of the wealth of the country and we have thoroughly deserved a better deal than we get. Tax the wealthy to pay for it. So, let's shout it loud and clear: **HANDS OFF OUR BUS PASSES!**

Leonard Goldman

Editor: Why not come to the Any Questions debate on 31st March and put this to election candidates in person? (see p3).



The Pensioners' Forum is here to raise your issues of concern, not only in this magazine, but through our committee, who are members of local steering groups and older people's councils in the city.

Please send in any of your concerns, - be it housing, health, transport or anything else you think relevant - either directly to us for raising at our meetings, or to publish in The Pensioner. We exist to give you a voice!



Thank you for the very useful and entertaining 'Older Peoples' Day' At Hove Town Hall. Older people are very important!

Yours sincerely,
Ray Wootton

Milk, mind games & marijuana

Nita Farmer, volunteer working on fundraising for the 60+ Action Group, gives her stance on reaching an advanced age.

'Ageing is inevitable, but decay is optional – stay younger longer!'

I saw a sign proclaiming this message outside a 'wellness centre' at the end of last year and it got me thinking. The quest for eternal youth has been an obsession of mankind almost since the beginning of time, but in the 21st century the emphasis is increasingly on managing the process of getting older and maintaining health as people live much longer than they used to. One can hardly open a newspaper or magazine without seeing yet another report by health experts and scientific researchers telling us what to do, eat

or drink in order to retard the decline of our minds and bodies.

Some of these articles are depressing... "Brain power peaks at 22, then it's downhill" - "over 85's are the fastest growing age group". I'm not sure I want to know this! There is a deluge of dietary and lifestyle advice; apparently drinking five cups of coffee a day could prevent you getting Alzheimer's disease, but on the other hand drinking lots of milk can have the same result. More bizarre is the claim that 'Marijuana helps keep the brain young'. We are urged to

do computerised mind games and crosswords, tackle Sudoku puzzles to keep our minds functioning, and yoga and tai chi to maintain our bodies.

However maintaining a positive and humorous outlook is surely equally important. Some of the liveliest older people I have ever met were those who were able to have a good laugh at the ageing process. Yes, from 60 onwards one is classified as 'old' in the public consciousness, but suppose we were to use different terminology? Wouldn't it be better to describe older people as 'chronologically gifted or experientially enhanced'? These are terms that are much more positive, powerful and expressive of the wisdom and knowledge that come with age. Remember that Youth is a gift of nature - Age is a work of art.

It's a matter of trust

Susan Midha from Solicitors for the Elderly explains a little about her work with older people and the work of SFE.

Lawyers won't win any popularity contests. Evidence the web and the jokes about us – few of them flattering (Question: Why won't sharks attack lawyers? – Answer: Professional courtesy).

But many people do still value their family lawyer: the person whom they have confidence in and who may know as much of the family history as some of the family members – and in some cases more.

As a barrister who became a solicitor specialising in private client work – wills, trusts, estate administration, powers of attorney – some 20 years ago, I have had the privilege of serving clients and guiding them through some of the most difficult times and decisions of their lives.

When and how to take over responsibility for a loved one's financial affairs, or to make the decision that he or she should go into long term care, can be agonising decisions and, as solicitors, our experience of similar problems can often help us suggest

solutions tailor made to a particular person's circumstances, and present the solutions tactfully and with delicacy.

Or perhaps the decision is whether to share a home with an adult child. Apart from the numerous practical considerations, the legal implications can be significant – what impact will it have on one's will? Should one recognise the greater input of the child who is doing the caring? How will one's other children view it? What happens if one's money is tied up in the shared home?

How does one negotiate the labyrinth of financial issues surrounding long term care, between free NHS care, local authority funding, deferred fee agreements, disregards? And how do you ensure that your estate passes to the people you want it to pass to, without the government taking more of it from you than you feel you want to pay?

As a founding member of Solicitors for the Elderly these are the areas of my everyday work. SFE, created 10 years

ago, is a grouping of lawyers from firms throughout the country, whose work is very much involved with the concerns of older people, and who promote good practice and increasingly influence public policy. But as an organisation and individually, our experience is that the clients we serve are themselves very individual.

Even in the 20 years I have been practising, I have seen an encouraging increase in confidence and assertiveness among older people, which makes my role in advising them both challenging and hugely enjoyable. I believe the psychologist Scott Peck said that the more he acted for people the more he marvelled at the resilience and innate goodness of humanity.

My experience echos that – although I might always have to make an exception to those clients who happen to be lawyers.

To find a member of SFE near you, search www.solicitorsfortheelderly.com or telephone 0870 0670282.

Health or social care...

Is something bothering you?

Tell Brighton and Hove's LINK all about it.

We have powers to make change happen.

Contact us on 01273 810235 or visit www.bhlink.org

Brighton and Hove Local Involvement Network (LINK) is an independent body, fully independent of the NHS & the council. The LINK has legal powers and is a powerful network of individuals, groups & communities who work together to improve health & social care in Brighton and Hove.



A Lady of my Age

(or: My Book-Ridden Den)

By Connie Fraser

A lady of my age
has a home that is neat
and tidy and clean
- not the book ridden den
where I share all my days
with my bears and my books
filling up crannies
lurking in nooks...

...cuddled up closely
with me in my bed,
stretched out to envelope
the room overhead...

But they're banned from the stairs
as I don't want to fall
over books, over bears
going heels over head,
oh no - not at all.

For I mean to get older,
though outside the mould
of lady-like age
and respectable grannies,
with my bears and my books
in all nooks and crannies...

I will further declare
that just for adventure
- a do for a dare -
and even with asthma,
I'd jump over the moon
if it wasn't so far
in the cold and the gloom...

No, it's warmer to dream
in my book-ridden den
where I don't fit the mould
of the lady-like old...

- But who does... in Brighton?!



Book review

Help at Home: what may be available in your local area

Although most older people live independently in their own homes, if they are frail or disabled this can be difficult without the support and help of other people or services. There is a wide range of assistance available but, sometimes it is difficult to know where to get information about it. This guide gives information about the types of help which may be available to help you stay in your own home.

This excellent 40 page information guide no. 14 is published by Counsel and Care and is available from them; phone 0207 241 8522 for a free copy (though donations are welcomed).

Brighton & Hove Pensioners' Association Diary Dates

Meetings take place on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at Brighton Trades & Labour Club, 16 Lewes Road, Brighton (almost opposite the bottom of Elm Grove). Tea and Coffee is from 11.00am for 11.30 am start. Join in with the following discussions!

April 13: Adam Bachelor – Project Officer Recycling, Brighton & Hove City Council.

May 11: David Sewell – Brighton Pavilion Café (on 60 years).

June 8: Craig Golding – Citizens Advice Bureau.

Join the Brighton and Hove Pensioners' Forum today! Annual Membership Fee just £3

What you get for your subscription:

- Membership of an organisation run by older people for older people
- 'The Pensioner' magazine delivered to your door quarterly
- A chance to vote for or be elected to the management committee
- Opportunities to participate in our campaigning work
- Opportunities to participate in a range of other Forum activities (to date these have included poetry, art, theatre, dance, music and photography projects)

I wish to join the Brighton & Hove Pensioners' Forum (subscription renewable each November).

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Subscription renewal: **YES / NO** New member: **YES / NO**

Cheques payable to Brighton & Hove Pensioners' Forum, and returned to: Pensioners' Forum, 1st Floor, Intergen House, 65 – 67 Western Road, Hove, BN3 2QJ

Data Protection Act: The information you have provided on this form will be used to keep you up-to-date with Forum activities. On occasions, the Forum may decide it is appropriate to pass your contact details on to other organisations who wish to make contact with older people (i.e. Health Service, City Council, arts or community organisations). If you DO NOT wish your contact details to be passed on, please tick here

Signed _____ Date _____